



# STORM IN CHANDIGARH: A TALE OF INTERPERSONAL INCOMPATIBILITY

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Nayantara Sahgal's third novel *Storm in Chandigarh* like her other novels presents a juxtaposition of two worlds: The personal world of man-woman relationship and the interpersonal world of politics. The interpersonal incompatibility happens to be the most dominant subject in the novel depicting the Husband-Wife alienation resulting from lack of communication, extra-marital relationship, existentialistic problems and temperamental irreconcilability. The storm in the lives of three married couples *Inder* and *Saroj*, *Jit* and *Mara* and *Vishal* and *Leela* is portrayed against the political backdrop of storm or confrontation between the newly divided states of Punjab and Haryana over the issue of Chandigarh.

The characters in the novel are at the same time modern as well as traditional in their outlook of life which is clearly presented through their attitude to love, morality, education, man woman relationship and architecture. In this paper my intention is to provide the predicament of interpersonal incompatibility between male and female characters in the backdrop of an unresolved clash of political personalities.

Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* is primarily a novel in which her political and personal concerns are interwoven in the background of the historical event of the partition of Indian Punjab in 1966. The author has opted for a narrative style marked with the intensity of emotion and a penetrating thought stating that woman should not be seen in the stereotypical passive roles of sex object in the modern society or as the one who is fit only to manage home chores and children without any self identity of her own. She is equally concerned about the degradation of human values in the contemporary politics of India. Nayantara writes:

".....Majority of the people are inspired and guided by the crude instincts, hunger, sex, power"

*Storm in Chandigarh*, 55

The scene is set in the city of Chandigarh, the capital of newly created states of Punjab and Haryana. From the very outset an air of tension and trouble looms large between these two newly formed states of north India. *Gyan Singh* and *Harpal Singh* Chief Ministers of Punjab and Haryana respectively are highly critical of each other and hold completely divergent stance. The Union Home Minister deposes *Vishal Dubey* an ICS officer in the ministry of Home Affairs to bridge the gap between the two warring Chief Ministers, which although never happens and *Dubey* is later on called back to Delhi after the death of Home Minister.

When we look at *Storm in Chandigarh* as a political novel, it appears to be laying thrust on degradation and degeneration of human values in the contemporary political environment of the post colonial Indian nation, which ironically indicates an end of the Gandhian era. One can easily discover the hunger for power and money as the real motif behind people joining politics. The novel seems to be a battle of noble ideas versus devilish instincts, conscience and integrity versus unscrupulousness and vested interest. Leaders like *Harpal Singh* who not only labour Gandhian values in their hearty but also practise them in their personal and professional lives unfortunately have to suffer miserably due to selfish and unethical antagonistic political forces like *Gyan Singh*. *Harpal Singh* is driven by a nationalistic vision and symbolises secular and ethnic unity representing larger expectations of the people and has to accept the division of the Punjab under political pressures. On the other hand *Gyan Singh* earns cheap public popularity by emotionally blackmailing them and applies all evil means to achieve immediate gains to be in power. He does not hesitate to opt for violent means and money power to achieve his vested political interest and hence *Harpal Singh* feels dejected.

The Union Minister symbolizes the Gandhian values of integrity, truth, non-violence and justice. Witnessing a deadlock between the two chief ministers and the apprehension of its serious repercussions, he deposes *Vishal Dubey* to visit Chandigarh for the peaceful resolution of issue between them. *Vishal Dubey* a

mature and competent officer was reposed upon full faith by the home minister to tackle the issue at human level. Since like Mahatma Gandhi the Home Minister believes in the larger integrity of the nation and is in fact an institution that signifies:

".....a single fierce allegiance to India and the invisible regard of an electorate far wider than the one that regularly elected him to parliament"

*Storm in Chandigarh*

At the end of the story the death of Home Minister symbolizes the death of the Gandhian era, which stood for freedom from fear, indomitable will and sacrifice for the nation.

So far as the aspirations of the people of Chandigarh are concerned, they symbolize a "second chance, a starting from scratch" (SIC 55), but they receive a severe blow because of the failure of the efforts made to bring a peaceful environment between the leadership of Punjab and Haryana. In view of this the plight of Chandigarh is not different from other parts of India which faces the same problem of dearth of right people to inhabit this modern city.

Since the larger lot of the city is driven by the crude and evil instincts like sex, hunger and power so the leaders like *Gyan Singh* is well fitted into the character of the city of Chandigarh, where 'force' and authority make immediate impact and person like *Harpal Singh* is 'put into shade'.

Besides the political background this novel has a personal aspect also. The storm in the lives of the three married couples *Inder* and *Saroj*, *Jit* and *Mara* and *Vishal* and *Leela* also finds a vast space in the apparently political storm in Chandigarh. *Vishal Dubey's* marriage to *Leela* turns out to be a failure and after her death he is revelling in furtive satisfaction in sexual liaison with *Gauri*, wife of *Nikhil*, a Delhi based businessman and a friend of *Vishal Dubey*. While at Chandigarh, *Vishal Dubey* develops one more relationship with *Saroj*, wife of *Inder*. *Inder* on the other hand has a secret and sexually prone relationship with another woman *Mara*, wife of *Jit Sahani*. *Inder* and *Jit* are friends and both are in business. At the end of the story *Mira* comes back to *Jit* and *Saroj* leaves *Inder* and goes to Delhi to live with *Vishal Dubey* whereas *Inder* is left alone.

The two parallel plots of the story highlighting the importance of human values both in political and personal spheres of life are beautifully interwoven through the logical link of *Vishal Dubey*. As a political novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* focuses on the degeneration of human values in the existing political environment of the country which at its root level indicates an end of Gandhian era. Lone thus depicts:

".....pleads for the new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self centeredness."

Lone, Iftikhar Hussaine, Nayantara Sahgal: *Feminist Currents in Storm in Chandigarh*

To conclude it can be emphasized that in *Storm in Chandigarh*, Sahgal's approach to presentation of her points of view is fictionally creative and artistically convincing. Despite the fact that this novel is shadowed with autobiographical leanings the writer has successfully dealt with reality of the Indian political situation in the late sixties which highlights deterioration of moral values in public life, with its related effects on personal and private values.

## REFERENCES:

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